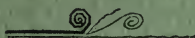


SOME INSTITUTIONAL LIBRARY PROBLEMS

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REMOTE STORAGE

SOME INSTITUTIONAL LIBRARY PROBLEMS.

By Julia A. Robinson, Supervising Librarian, State Institutions of Iowa.

For seventeen months your supervising librarian has traveled up and down the state, visiting during that time each institution at least twice and some three times, taking from, adding to and otherwise endeavoring to make your libraries a real force in your institutions for recreation, for instruction, for healing and for uplift. That these libraries are not yet wholly ideal I think you will all agree, though some may be in one and some in another particular. That you all wish them so to be I am equally sure, even though this may involve problems seemingly difficult of solution. I think I realize these difficulties. Did I not, I should labor with you individually until like the unjust judge you should yield lest I weary you with my much speaking.

While institutional libraries share the problems common to all libraries, some are much more emphasized, some less. They may be broadly divided into (1) books, (2) their housing and shelving, (3) machinery for their care and distribution and (4) some one to keep the machinery in motion.

1. Books. The question of books carries with it several others, the first and most important of which is naturally their selection. The object for which a library is established, the use which is to be made of it and the readers for whom the books are intended govern the selection of the books which are to constitute the library.

I need not speak to-day of the object of our institutional libraries, nor introduce to this audience the readers for whom they are intended, nor tell you that the different libraries should be differentiated to meet the needs of the different classes of readers. Neither is it for me to-day to discuss those needs. That is to be done by others. I may, however, be permitted to speak of one problem in this connection which will probably not be elsewhere mentioned. There seems to be to all of us a halo surrounding the

printed page, especially when bound between two covers, and no matter how dingy or worn those covers, how soiled the page, how eye-destroying the print, or how badly worn, generally disreputable, unsuitable, out-of-date or useless to ourselves a book may be, so loth are we to destroy it, and so sure that it will be of value to some one else, that we insist upon passing it on to become to him what it has been in our own libraries, dead timber, a cumberer of the shelves, a gatherer of dust and germs, but more than that a usurper of the place of another and more useful book. We are all tinged with this idiosyncrasy and are all happy if we can find some one to whom to give a book which we no longer want.

All libraries are recipients of such donations and the institutional libraries were probably begun and their numbers often increased in this way. But the value of a library lies not in numbers but in selection and such books add nothing to and their withdrawal takes nothing from the library, but when once they have found their way to the shelves brave is the librarian who attempts their removal. Even when it seems wise to make room for new and useful books by displacing some of these from their office of dust gatherers their disposition becomes a serious problem, and we are often guilty of the same generosity which has brought them to us and those which finally reach the furnace room are neither speeded on their way nor welcomed at their destination.

There are books sufficiently old to have dinginess and germs and worm holes add to their value, but I regret to say that I have found none such. Nor do I mean to say that all books not constantly called for are useless. Far from it, for we must maintain good collections of standard books even though they may be seldom taken out, but they will be much more seldom read if they are offered in old and unattractive editions. I am a firm believer in the gospel of good clothes in books and feel sure that they not only attract more readers but leave a better moral influence.

After the selections have been made comes the question of ordering and buying. This is complicated in the institutional libraries by the necessity of taking bids which increases the difficulty of always securing the editions desired and of buying at second hand as much as we might otherwise do. If it were possible to take advantage of remainder sales and second-hand rates of reliable dealers money might often be saved and the libraries be able to afford books which they cannot now buy, but if by the present method we are protected from the importunities of book agents it may not be an unmixed evil.

Another question much discussed in all library circles is re-binding versus cheaper editions. When the cheap editions are in good print and binding and a second copy can be purchased for the cost of binding and will be clean and attractive, it seems better to buy

the cheaper edition and replace instead of rebind. There are titles of course which cannot be bought in this form with which early binding becomes economy. In one library only have we tried reenforced binding with not very satisfactory results.

2. Library Rooms. A collection of books constituting a library requires a safe place for their housing, with suitable shelving and other conveniences for their care and use.

Our public libraries in town and city stand beside the schools and churches, taking their places as educational and moral factors in the community life, and the character of the buildings is in keeping with their object, being dignified and substantial without and attractive and convenient within, with no effort spared to serve those who enter their doors. Not only is it the privilege of the public to select and carry away books for their pleasure and information but to linger and read books, magazines and newspapers provided in abundance, to study in quiet, or to consult books placed at their disposal by the courteous attendant. Shall the libraries stand for less in the institutions and shall they do less for their users whose needs are so much greater?

Several of our institutions are fortunate enough to possess large and attractive library rooms with adequate shelving capacity and with tables on which magazines are attractively displayed. Some have sufficient shelving but no space for tables, and others are shelved in business offices where library and business interfere and confusion for both ensues. The dignity and usefulness of the library requires larger and more commodious quarters in many of our state institutions, but space is so limited that this becomes one of our most serious problems.

Not only do we need more space for the proper care and distribution of the books but for use as reading-rooms. In several institutions this privilege is extended to officers and employes, but in very few even where they have the space is it given to the inmates. If all of these libraries could be opened for this purpose to at least part of the inmates at prescribed times and under proper restrictions, I believe that the usefulness of the libraries would be greatly increased. We hear much of the waste of churches closed during the week and of schoolhouses closed during long vacation periods. It seems to me there is something going to waste in our institutional libraries as they exist to-day—always closed to those for whom they are provided.

I never prepare new books for the shelves without wishing that others might share with me the pleasure of handling them, dipping into them, looking at the pictures and enjoying their freshness. I can think of nothing in my work in the institutions which has given me more satisfaction than the Sunday afternoon at Eldora when we brought the boys in by companies and allowed them to look at

and handle the new books. 'Tis needless to say that they were much more eager to read them when the opportunity was given.

And what is true of new books is true of the old also. Six books mean more than one, even though only one can be read at a time, and twenty more than six, and a book-lined room has a cultural influence hard to escape from. An opportunity to read, browse and examine books has a refining effect and a book selected by the reader from the many is of more value to him than one from the small group parcelled out to the cottages.

To have been born into a home where books abound and to grow up in this atmosphere is to have an influence thrown around a life which is lasting. Naturally, then, few if any of the inmates of our state institutions have been so privileged, and to give them this environment for even a short time each week is perhaps to cultivate in them a taste which will lead them to the public library instead of the street when they have gone from our midst.

I would not have these rooms used for visiting or playing games. There are other places more suited for those things. But I would have them reading-rooms in the truest sense of the word.

If reading-rooms of this kind could be provided in the state hospitals it would give the patients an opportunity to look at books and pictures which cannot be loaned and would add greatly to their pleasure in the library.

I might be considered a candidate myself for one of these hospitals when I advocate a reading-room for the reformatory were the warden not as anxious for it as I am. This would need to be under supervision of course and the privilege could not be extended to all, but those are matters for the warden, not the librarian, to settle. I wish that a similar room might be provided at Fort Madison also.

Lack of space in some institutions and lack of time on the part of the librarians in others has been in the way of carrying out such a plan in the past, but I am looking forward to better things in the future.

3. Machinery. The simplest methods of organization and administration are most desirable, yet they must be such as to furnish information of the whereabouts of the books at any time, whether in the hands of the readers or on the shelves, and to make the resources of the library available to its users.

These requirements are met as in a public library: (1) By records consisting of (a) the accession book, containing a record of books by acquisition with information as to source, cost, classification, etc., etc., which with the withdrawal book will show at any time the number of volumes in the library and their value, and (b) a card list of books as they stand on the shelves; (2) By classification and arrangement on the shelves according to the Dewey decimal

system and a catalogue or finding list of some kind. For those who visit the libraries card catalogues by author, title or dictionary arrangement have been provided in most of the libraries, and for those who cannot do so bookmarks or special lists until such time as finding lists can be prepared; (3) A loan system which shall most readily bring books and readers together and leave a record of the borrower. Books are charged by cards in all the institutions. In the penitentiary and reformatory the readers cannot visit the library and selections must be made from finding lists, and called for by cards. In several of the other institutions the readers make their own selections and exchanges of books by personal visits to the library. In the educational institutions, however, the selections are made by the matrons of the cottages and the books sent there to be relented to the individual readers, two sets of cards being used. It is here that I wish a change might be made and that the boys and girls might have the opportunity to visit the library and make their own selections with the advice and help of the librarian.

I have already spoken of the use of the library as a reading-room and of its value to those who may thus visit it. If they could also learn something of the classification and shelving of the books and the use of the card catalogue and become familiar with the methods of exchanging books it might make their visits to the public library much more sure and frequent some day. The boys and girls who have been my helpers have learned to regard books with a new interest and have finished their library work with regret.

Another problem is the difficulty of securing accurate reports of the reading done where the books are sent in groups to the wards where there are many more readers than the cards show. To attempt to loan by card only would probably cut down the reading very materially and we have not yet been able to devise a remedy for this difficulty. The same is true of the periodicals. Yet if we cannot have both reading and accurate reports the reading is the more important and should not be interfered with.

4. Librarian. All library machinery is but a means for bringing books and readers together, but behind the machinery there must be intelligence and sympathy. To keep the records however accurately and to hand out books in however large quantities is not the whole duty of a librarian. No matter how excellent the selection of books not every one is suited to all readers, and if they are to bring the best results there must be a wise application to individual needs. This is recognized in the public library where the most competent librarian in the children's room is not placed at the desk to stamp dates and enter numbers. But one who knows children and books is on the floor among the shelves helping the readers to find and choose the right books. Such a librarian is equally needed in our institutions where the books are to be used for mental and moral

healing and should be selected with care and loaned with discrimination. Some who now make the selections are competent and interested but not all are and few have the time to do it well.

Much as this side of the work appeals to the supervising librarian, and she recognizes it as that for which all others are but a preparation, her visits are too brief to give her the necessary acquaintance with the readers, too crowded to give her time for this part of the work, and too infrequent to yield results. What is needed in each institution is some one with an appreciation of the value of the book in the development of mind and character, an acquaintance with at least the books in her own library, an acquaintance with her readers, a desire to increase their number and to bring to them what may be theirs through the printed page. With a trained librarian in the field to supervise the work the qualities which I have named are more important than technical training.

I am glad to say that in some of our institutions we have librarians who answer this description, but with few exceptions they are busy people who undertake this work in addition to other duties and without extra pay or the time to give to it which it needs. There are in some places those employed in other capacities who would make excellent librarians if they could be relieved of part of their work and given time for this.

Such a librarian giving the needed time to this work would be economical, both materially and ethically, for reasons as follows: (1) It would enable her to keep the books in better repair by mending when needed, thus prolonging their usefulness; (2) It would secure better care of the books by making the readers directly responsible to her, where now as sent to the cottages and reloaned there is often difficulty in locating the blame and administering the penalty for a damaged book; (3) She would be better able to watch the books loaned and secure their prompt return, thereby avoiding losses; (4) On the ethical side she would be able to increase the efficiency of the library by permitting its use as a reading-room; (5) By allowing more frequent exchange of books she would secure a larger circulation, for many would read more books than they are now able to obtain; (6) By having time for visiting wards and cottages for talks about books and reading aloud she would increase the interest and secure a larger number of readers and, last but not least, there might be secured a better fitting of books and readers.

To show how this works may I quote from a letter recently received from the librarian of one of the state hospitals:

"I have had quite good success this winter in getting the patients to read, and the circulation has increased materially. While I do not give half my time to the library, I have all the time I need, and that usually means four afternoons a week. The library is only open one hour once a week, but I often supply books to patients during the

week and also give out a good many books to employes when I happen to be working in the library. I take lists of books to the wards and the patients choose what they want. Since I have been going on the wards I have been able to keep track of the books and have not lost one. I think I can tell you now what kind of books the patients want, and I hope we may have some new ones soon."

While this is not wholly ideal in all particulars since the library is open only once a week and there is no reading-room in connection with it, yet it is a step in the direction toward which I am looking.

What then is our aim?

1. For each institution a library adequate in size and adapted in selection to the readers who are to use it, including collections of standards, some reference books and an officers' library on subjects relating to that institution, and magazines and current papers for both the inmates and employes.

2. A library room with shelving for present needs and allowance for expansion, with the necessary equipment for library use and with tables and chairs and light for reading and open for that purpose to officers and inmates as conditions make feasible.

3. A system of organization and administration which shall make the resources of the library most available to all its readers, and give them so far as possible the opportunity to make their own selections and exchanges of books.

4. A librarian interested and competent to whom the work is as important as any other assigned to her and with the time to give it needed attention, and a desire to so use the books as to make them show their value in individual cases and with different classes of readers.

5. Readers who shall make evident in increasing numbers that the libraries in the state institutions of Iowa are accomplishing the results for which they are maintained.



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